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## ABSTRACT

An increasingly popular form of mass media persuasion is the "docudrama," a hybrid of the informative documentary and the dramatic film. The docudrama format presents viewers with a purposive viewpoint or value-laden interpretation of reality and contains some degree of historical accuracy and factual authenticity. The docudrama also draws heavily from motion picture production techniques, such as narrative structure, camera angle, and sound. A comparison of the television docudrama "Guyana Tragedy: The Story of Jim Jones" with the dramatic motion picture "Guyana--Cult of the Damned" highlights the differences between these two genres. Docudrama is a form of de-rhetorical speech in that it alters viewers' perceptions of reality, but its distortion of history for dramatic effect does not observe the ethics of rhetoric. The following question is posed by this evolving genre: At what point does a critic draw the line between "dramatic license" and "historical distortion"? (HTH)

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THE "DE-RHETORICAL" FUNCTION OF DOCUDRAMA:

A GENERIC APPROACH

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## THE "DE-RHETORICAL" FUNCTION OF DOCUDRAMA:

### A GENERIC APPROACH

Rhetorical critics have expanded their analytical horizons during recent years in the explication of such non-traditional and non-oratorical artifacts as the television newscast, comic strips, film, prime-time programming, and popular music.<sup>1</sup> Another increasingly popular form of mass media persuasion receiving attention from critics of rhetoric and broadcasting alike, has been the hybrid documentary drama or "docudrama."<sup>2</sup> There exists today a good deal of controversy surrounding the docudrama specifically, and genres of documentary in general.<sup>3</sup> Definitional problems lead us to questions of what type of program falls within the purview of docudrama. Moreover, critics have begun to question the ethicality of docudrama as "a creative interpretation of reality . . . not reality itself."<sup>4</sup> Finally, the critic needs to further investigate the "evolution" of docudrama, an indication of the "ephemeral" or changing nature inherent in this form. In effect, the rhetorical critic is concerned with the substantive, stylistic, and situational elements manifest in docudrama as media rhetoric.

This essay will examine the evolution of docudrama as a "hybrid" genre of media persuasion by extracting substantive and stylistic features from fiction and non-fiction film as well as a variety of documentary genres. In addition, a generic analysis employing "analog criticism" will be undertaken to compare the substantive and formal elements in both film (i.e., the "Hollywood" motion picture) and the docudrama formulas. This investigation, therefore, will compare how the film and docudrama

presentations portray the tragic events surround the "Guyana" story and the subsequent mass suicides involving the Reverend Jim Jones and members of "The People's Temple." The film version entitled, "Guyana-Cult of the Damned," will be analyzed in juxtaposition to the 4-hour "special event" on CBS, "Guyana Tragedy: The Story of Jim Jones." the network docudrama first broadcast in April, 1980. Such an endeavor serves to contrast the form and content in these two portrayals. Those elements and strategies borrowed from film and documentary genres that shape the docudrama format will be highlighted in discussing the evolution of docudrama as a bona fide genre in its own right. The rationale for such an investigation will shed light on the ephemeral nature of the docudrama and the establishment of potential "sub-genres" derived from established film genres and standard documentary. The ethical ramifications of the docudrama as "de-rhetorical" speech will be examined when considering the possible suasy effects of docudrama, as a form of rhetoric, in altering the perceptions of viewers and "inviting" the audience to know or experience any historically documented event such as Guyana and the nature of cults in an established order or society.

#### Docudrama as Hybrid Genre

The docudrama has evolved from those substantive and structural characteristics familiar to viewers of film and documentary genres. The docudrama, therefore, is "partially derived"<sup>5</sup> from documentary, which Carroll describes as "a reconstruction of reality, using real people and events in a socially-meaningful structure, and recorded at the time and place of their occurrence. its purpose is to inform, perhaps motivate,

the audience."<sup>6</sup> However, Carroll later expands his definition of documentary to include those filmic presentations which investigate "actual events and circumstances (e.g. situations) in a manner that maintains fidelity to fact, uses the actual geographic locations and participants in the situation, is based on a 'purposive' point of view, conveys 'knowledge about' a situation, and is a delayed analysis--recorded on film or video tape--of the circumstance or event."<sup>7</sup> There is some evidence that the "pure" documentary format is on the wane, especially the network productions such as ABC News Closeup, CBS Reports, and NBC News Reports.<sup>8</sup> Austin has found that such programming, consisting of "news specials" and "newsmagazines" constitutes only 2.4 percent of the overall programming on the three major networks and their local affiliates.<sup>9</sup> Producer Alan Landsburg states, "I was a practitioner of the pure documentary and I found it a frustrating form, finally. I was delighted to find docudrama occurring as an avenue of being able to communicate more than the existing or shootable film allowed."<sup>10</sup> What characteristics or elements, therefore, does the pure documentary "lend" to the docudrama? What substantive and formal features are incorporated into this "hybrid" format?

First, the documentary in its pure form contains subject matter of actual circumstances, historical events, and documented situations. Moreover, the pure documentary, as does the docudrama format, presents to the viewer/spectator a purposive viewpoint or value-laden interpretation of reality. In addition, the docudrama's structure takes its form through a "structure of oppositions" in which levels of dramatic conflict are established between characters and the situations in which the characters

and the situations in which the characters interact. Thus, the docudrama does contain some degree of historical accuracy and factual authenticity both substantively and structurally. This appears to be one advantage of the docudrama that film does not possess as intensely or consistently. In fact, Jerry Adler, formerly of Universal Studios, envisions the docudrama as an extension of television newscasting: "Most people still get their news in shorthand on TV and radio, and such docudrama could amplify and explain the news--just as CBS's 'Helter Skelter,' quite tastefully I think, explained the monstrosity of Charles Manson and his followers."<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the substantive and formal aspects derived from the pure documentary format, the hybrid docudrama extracts heavily from a variety of filmic elements and cinema production techniques. Of special significance here is the symbiotic relationship between the thematic elements and images in film, and the narrative structure or form that functions as a vehicle for conveying these themes. The film critic has made this endeavor less complicated however, by formulating a variety of film "genres" or formulas that consist of reoccurring themes and established structures that serve to distinguish between the different types of film. For example, Stanley Solomon illustrates a variety of such genres including the Western, the Musical, the Horror Movie, Crime Movies, Criminal Investigation Movies, and War Movies.<sup>13</sup> Solomon explains that the genres of film

. . . are all based on perceptual patterns that filmmakers intend to be observable from film to film, though all of these do not occur in all instances of the genre. . . .

Broadly put, a genre film is one in which the narrative pattern, or crucial aspects of that pattern, is visually recognizable as having been used similarly in other films. Although definitions of particular genres are often confined to the assembling of characteristics, it seems to me that the defining aspect of a genre is a certain mythic structure, formed on a core of narrative meaning found in those works that are readily discernible as related and belonging to a group. The core can be composed of different sorts of elements.

I would suggest that rhetorical critics engaged in generic analysis of any filmic artifact may gain significantly from a better understanding of film genres and the substantive and structural components manifest in each genre. What are these distinguishing features and common elements of film genres that have become part of the docudrama format? Perhaps the primary and most evident characteristic of any genre, film or otherwise, is its familiarity and recognizability by the viewers. How does genre theory enhance the critics understanding of persuasive filmic artifacts? That is, the audience comes to know and identify through form or the structural composition; that is what Kenneth Burke has called "conventional form" or "the appeal of form as form."<sup>15</sup> In that the audience has certain expectations aroused and fulfilled by the formal aspects of each film genre, the structure of film, in conjunction with the content, helps establish certain identifiable "plots," "scenarios," and situational characteristics that have become familiar to the viewer. In fact, some genres are "taken for granted" by viewers because of constant exposure to

the genre. Indeed, one facet that has received sparse attention from genre critics is the extent to which certain elements and features of a genre are simply implied and expected by an audience.

Another characteristic of film genres that has been incorporated, in fact, assimilated into docudrama, is the use of "fictive elements" through what I would call the art of "fictionalization" of characters, circumstances, and events. It will be argued later in this essay that in the portrayal of the Guyana tragedy in both film and docudrama presentations, the film version contained substantially more fictive elements than the CBS rendition.

Finally, a host of technical strategies and features of filmmaking are employed by the creators of television docudrama. Narrative structure, camera angle and shot selection, and the use of sound or musical score serve especially similar functions in both film and docudrama. The following "analog criticism" of the Guyana massacre attempts to highlight some of these considerations.

#### The Guyana Tragedy: An Analog Criticism

Lawrence Rosenfield's analog criticism of the "apologetic" discourse of Harry Truman and Richard Nixon may be applied, not only to the rhetoric of political statesmen, but may be similarly employed in the explication of film and documentary genres. In discussing the rhetoric of Truman and Nixon's "mass-media apologia" or "broadcast apologia," Rosenfield asserts that, "The generic resemblance of the two speeches (both may be classified as mass-media apologia) invites what may be called analog criticism-comparing the speeches in such ways that each address serves

as a reference standard for the other. The objective of such a method of comparison and contrast is two-fold: to specify the fundamental anatomical features which relate the two speeches . . . and to assess the relative artistic merit of each speech, compared to the other."<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the critic of any filmic media may incorporate the analog approach to discover the "anatomical features" manifest in film and documentary genres. This sort of critical endeavor aids the rhetorical critic in identifying more accurately those elements common to both pure documentary and film, while examining how docudrama incorporates these elements into its "hybrid" formula. The rationale for such an investigation is to find out to what extent the docudrama format has "borrowed" from standard documentary and film respectively; that is, the critic is concerned with how the docudrama has evolved and may be changing to reflect the "climate of opinion" of the times. Moreover, I would argue that the portrayal of the massacre in Jonestown, Guyana in the CBS docudrama represents what I see as a new trend or theme of docudrama, a "sub-genre" if you will, of the general docudrama format. In particular, this sub-genre elicits a central theme not unfamiliar to viewers of pure documentary or film; it is comprised of vivid scenes depicting mass murder and suicide, horror and death, the brutal atrocities that man inflicts upon his fellow man, and the destruction of mankind and races of people for gaining power. This new "sub-genre" of docudrama presents themes present in films like Eisenstein's "Strike" and "Potemkin" as well as "Night and Fog" by Resnais. All indications suggest that, as a result of its hybrid nature, the docudrama is continually evolving in its substantive and structural

makeup. This lends credence to the assertion that docudrama truly represents the apparent ephemerality manifest in evolving media genres. Moreover, the CBS docudrama, "Guyana Tragedy: The Story of Jim Jones," has borrowed freely those elements and "anatomical features" found in both standard documentary format and the genre of the "horror film" or what Solomon calls "The Nightmare World." Solomon describes this film genre when he states that,

Despite its honorable origins in the German expressionist cinema, despite its artistic triumphs and its popular successes, the horror genre richly deserves its abject status among critics and audiences, and even among many of its own followers who half-ashamedly confess to an addiction for it. It seems to me incontrovertible that the horror genre in the American cinema has been primarily exploitative, artless, frequently without taste or restraint or sense, and generally unworthy of serious attention. And yet the horror genre, ultimately, is a major genre because major artists of our time have worked seriously in it and produced notable films that range beyond the depiction of the horrific event to probe the nightmare world hidden in all of us. . . . In an era that intellectually gives little credence to devils, witches, and monsters, but lives continuously with massive violence, perversion, and nihilism, the horror film provides us with a protected access to nightmare world otherwise shunted outside of

civilization by the twentieth-century forces of sophistication, science, and sociology. The cinema of horror concretizes this nightmare world--our abstract fears of destruction and death.<sup>17</sup>

Just as the horror film genre provides the viewer with a protected access to the nightmare world, the evolving trend in docudrama provides a similar function. The monsters have changed into the Charles Manson, the Jim Joneses, and the Ohio National Guard, but their horror, brutality, and terror are even more real, because we know they actually happened. However, the viewer/spectator is indeed "protected" from any harm, even though he or she is part of the "nightmare" world being recreated. Thus, there is viewer involvement and identification taking place in the docudrama, but there is no real harm facing the viewer, only the assurance that scenes of terror, murder, and horror will be experienced.

The docudrama and film versions of the Guyana story must first be compared in relation to one another before discussing the evolution of the docudrama and its hybrid formula. I would suggest that the CBS docudrama and the film version, while necessarily containing similar attributes and characteristics, differ significantly in degree and proportion in several respects. The first aspect to be considered here will be the "fictionalization" or the use of fictive elements in the presentation to add dramatic interest and heighten conflict between characters and the situations in which they interact. For example, it is interesting to note that to some extent, both film and docudrama will fictionalize any given historical event through the use of "composites," characters in the drama whose names

and identities are changed or completely fabricated to enhance the drama and conflict. In the film version, "Guyana--Cult of the Damned," several instances of fictitious representation occurred. The narrator's voice introduced the film by stating, "This story is true. The names have been changed." The Home Box Office (HBO) listed the film as a "fictional recreation" in its description of this R-rated motion picture. Accordingly, the main characters had their names changed to the "Reverend James Johnson" and "Congressman O'Brien, the composites for their real life counterparts, Jim Jones and Congressman Ryan respectively. In contrast, the CBS docudrama, produced by Frank Konigsberg, while it fictionalized the names of the minor characters in the drama, used the actual names of Jones and Ryan, the major characters in the "lead" roles. Producer Konigsberg explains: "The Broadcast Standards people raised practically no objections--mostly because we avoided libel by portraying only six real people in the script, including Jones and Congressman Ryan, with the rest of the characters either composites or wholly fictitious."<sup>18</sup> The ethicality of this practice will be discussed in some detail later in this essay. However, it is interesting to speculate about the potential effect this practice has on the viewer. It should be noted that in a recent ABC docudrama entitled, "Attica," a violent depiction of the prison uprising in upstate New York near Buffalo, on September 13, 1971, this practice was similarly employed. Media critic Bob Buyer explains about this strategy in the docudrama, based on a book by reporter Tom Wicker called, A Time To Die. Unlike the book, however, the docudrama contained obvious fictitious elements and characters. Buyer states that, "Except for Wicker, Kunstler

and Bobby Seale, the onetime Black Panther leader, the other intermediaries are blurred characters. Glossed over are the efforts of Assemblyman Arthur Eve, Supreme Court Justice (then State Senator) Thomas F. McGowan and ex-University of Buffalo law professor Herman Schwartz. Inmate leaders like Roger Champen, Frank 'Big Black' Smith, L. D. Barclay, Herbert X. Blyden and Brother Richard Clark also are presented as composites."<sup>19</sup> Once again, to what extent has the authenticity of the original event and circumstances surrounding the Attica story been clouded and distorted. How has this strategy invited the viewer to experience or "know" the events of Attica? Why are the names and identities of the inmates and prisoners presented as composites as a means of protection, while the names and identities of the corrections officers, prison officials, and New York State political leaders (i.e. Corrections Commissioner Russell G. Oswald and Nelson Rockefeller) are not protected by composites?

A second area of comparison in the portrayal of the Guyana story is the use of exaggeration, a sort of "media hyperbole" if you will, to enhance conflict and dramatic effect. This element is apparent, of course, in the verbal as well as the visual imagery of both the film and the docudrama versions. The analog approach to criticism, however, should reveal to what extent this strategy was prevalent in each presentation. To be sure, the dialogue or spoken word revealed the film version to be far more "slanted" in its use of "bombast; high-sounding words without content; oratorical falsification to hide meaning; sophistry; ornamentation . . ."<sup>20</sup> The use of loaded, connotative language, or "ideological" terminology is a

prevalent characteristic of docudrama as well as film. I would suggest that this practice has its roots in both pure documentary and most film genres. Interestingly, the film, "Guyana--Cult of the Damned," was saturated with such directed, value-laden language. In this film version, the narrator used the following language in describing cult leader, Reverend "Johnson": "He forced us to share his paranoid visions," or "He wasn't God, he was a maniac who wanted to take all of us with him . . . We could never escape the voice of Johnson," and "We weren't supposed to think, only listen and obey." Similarly, the character of the Reverend Johnson, played by actor Stuart Whitman, was presented in a negative manner as a result of the character's dialogue and language. For example, during a scene in which two young temple members were caught in the act of fornication, Johnson preached: "You have violated the moral code, my oath." During one of his many sermons to the cult, he asserted that he was indeed God: "This hand, God's hand, my hand, will free you." The CBS docudrama was relatively free of this verbal exaggeration.

The verbal imagery and ideological language was not the only use of exaggeration or hyperbole employed to heighten conflict and enhance the dramatic narrative structure in these two presentations. The visual portrayals of the film's torture scenes depicting the evil nature of Reverend "Johnson" were in marked contrast in relation to the CBS docudrama. "Cult of the Damned" provided vivid scenes in which cult members punished other cult members who violated the rules of The People's Temple. Scenes of children being tortured by burning their flesh, drowning, and covering them with poisonous snakes were examples of this visual

exaggeration for purposes of enhancing conflict and portraying characters. Other scenes and depictions of degradation and humiliation were similarly illustrated in the film version, while the docudrama refrained from such visual recreations.

A third area of comparison emerging from our analog criticism is the projection of implicit and explicit meanings conveyed by both genres of media rhetoric. While the CBS docudrama did not state explicitly why people are attracted to cults such as The People's Temple, or how it is that people are persuaded to follow men like Adolf Hitler, Charles Manson, and Jim Jones, that theme is the underlying current running throughout the docudrama; it represents the theme that pervades the docudrama presentation. However, and in marked contrast, the film version used the narrator's "voice over" to explicitly warn the viewer/spectator that "cult leaders prey on the weak and disenchanted" members of society. The film version explicitly condemned all cults in a final "epideictic" given by the narrator at the film's end. This "blanket" condemnation of cults as a degeneration of society and its rules similarly blamed the cult mentality on man's desire and obsession for power and greed. It then praised the dedication of journalists, especially those who gave their lives in Guyana. The CBS docudrama version was not nearly as overt as the film rendition, and allowed the viewer to form opinions and make judgements with far more freedom than its cinematic counterpart.

Another comparison between the film and docudrama versions of the Guyana story centers around the "historical distortion" of the tragic event. Naturally, both of these formats necessarily lend themselves to

drama and conflict, and a value-laden interpretation of any past event because of narrative structure, character opposition, and visual conflict. Both the film and the docudrama distorted actual circumstances and events during the massacre at the Jonestown jungle airstrip where Congressman Ryan and four others were slain. Critic Bill Davidson rejects the CBS docudrama's depiction of this visually graphic and haunting scene: "One problem . . . is that 'Guyana Tragedy' actually portrays more violence than its real-life original. Nine people are fatally stitched by automatic-weapons fire in the TV version of the attack . . . whereas only five were killed in real-life Rep. Leo Ryan's investigating party. Asked about this, producer Frank Konigsberg shrugged and said, 'We made up a lot of extra characters and had more to get rid of.'<sup>21</sup> The film version also added extra characters (i.e. more dead bodies) to enhance the massacre scene at the airstrip. It may be noted, however, that the film version, "Cult of the Damned," added another violent scene in which the Congressman was attacked and stabbed by a cult member immediately prior to his departure to the United States. The CBS docudrama omitted this scene. Ironically, while the film version in this instance was historically accurate (Congressman Ryan was actually stabbed as his party was preparing to leave Jonestown), it also added to the violence and character conflict not evident in the CBS production.

A final comparison between the film and docudrama portrayals of Guyana concerns the structural considerations of each presentation. The narrative format was apparent in both the film and the docudrama. However, in the film version, the narrator's voice "guided" the

viewer/spectator in a highly strategic and well-conceived manner. For example, throughout the film version, the voice of the narrator preceded the visuals that reinforced and vivified the verbal message. In addition, the viewer was informed that the "narrator" of the film was indeed one of the "survivors" of the Guyana massacre and had been a member of The People's Temple for several years. It was as though the viewer was being "invited" to hear a personal accounting of the tragedy. The CBS docudrama contained no such "narrative voice" in its depiction.

The use of musical score was a common feature incorporated into both of the generic formats, although music was far more prevalent in the film version. Also, the music was decidedly more ominous and foreboding in the film than the docudrama version. This, I think, enhanced and amplified the macabre and gruesome "atmosphere" of the film version; the musical element functioned to "set the mood" for the viewer, while reinforcing the verbal images, themes, and plot of the film. The musical score in the CBS docudrama was far less foreboding and occurred less frequently, primarily during or preceding scenes of violence or dramatic confrontation.

Another structural consideration worthy of discussion for the critic using the analog approach to filmic media is the creation of "character opposition" or levels of "dialectical tension" between protagonist and antagonist, the classic struggle between "Good and Evil." The film, "Cult of the Damned," placed the greatest emphasis on the conflict between character composites "Reverend Johnson" and "Congressman O'Brien," while repeatedly stressing the former's loyalty to the Soviet Union and denunciatory statements and assertions against the United States. During

the CBS docudrama, in which only 20 minutes of the 4-hour "special event" related to the airstrip massacre and subsequent mass suicide, the primary conflict of characters was inherently racial and religious, as it took place in the early years of Jim Jones' life. The opposition came from anti-black, racist elements or factions in society against the members of The People's Temple in California. This portrayal in the CBS version may have provided a greater insight into the reasons why people are attracted to cults, and in this respect, a fuller explanation as to how a Jim Jones or a Charles Manson assembles such a following of devoted "family members." What do these comparisons between film and docudrama versions of the Guyana story tell us about genres of media persuasion and the ethical implications of docudrama as "de-rhetorical" speech?

#### The "De-rhetorical" Function of Docudrama:

##### Addressing Media Ethics

Benson states that "de-rhetorical" speech is "a rhetorical parallel to Barthe's 'de-politicized' speech. De-rhetorical speech is any symbolic form that performs the functions of rhetoric, or occupies the ecological niche theoretically allotted to rhetoric, but which does not or cannot accept the obligations of rhetoric as a mode of being, knowing, and doing."<sup>22</sup> I would suggest that the hybrid docudrama is indeed a form of "de-rhetorical" speech, as is film, pure documentary format, television newscasts, political commercials, and prime-time situation comedies. Moreover, this assertion addresses the ethical issue implicit in any form of rhetoric; the relationship between rhetoric and ethics.

The relationship of rhetoric and ethics in media persuasion is in

further need of critical scrutiny by rhetorical critics. The docudrama format, as this essay has suggested, may distort or slant historical events or the circumstances surrounding those events in a variety of ways. If we assume that docudrama has the ability and potential to influence a viewer's perceptions of reality or alter an audience's attitude concerning some past event, it is necessarily functioning as rhetoric. Similarly, if the thematic and structural elements indicate that a certain "perspective" has been taken by the director and producer of any television docudrama in the portrayal and recreation of some past event, the depiction indeed serves as media persuasion. However, when history is distorted in order to heighten dramatic conflict, visual stimulation, and audience identification with the drama's characters, the critic is now directing his or her attention to the ethical concerns of docudrama. Does the "rhetor" have an ethical obligation as an artist/creator of media persuasion? Are the writers, producers, directors, camerapersons, and editors to be held responsible for their messages and the possible effects of those messages on viewers? Alan Landsburg, producer of the popular docudramas, "Fear on Trial" and "The Triangle Factory Fire Scandal," rejects the idea of taking responsibility: "We're never going to be able to be fact, fact, fact and fill our function as dramatists." Producer Gerald Isenberg similarly asserts, "Docudrama is a creative interpretation of reality. It's not reality itself."<sup>23</sup> However, if this is the case, the claims by many directors and producers of docudrama that they are beneficial because they act as "extensions" of the news on network broadcasts, become somewhat invalid. The network news,

although it too is an interpretation of reality, at least attempts to achieve some measure of objectivity; the docudrama makes no such claim. Thus, the dilemma facing the critic investigating forms of "de-rhetorical" speech becomes even more clouded. The creators of any docudrama, in effect, become the message-makers in any filmic/media genre, as well as in public address or the rhetoric of the political arena. As a result of the dramatic nature of the message, however, the obligations and responsibilities for that rhetoric appear lacking on the part of the rhetor. This essay will not attempt to provide solutions for this problem. Critics engaging in further analysis of media persuasion as "de-rhetorical" speech, however, need to address this issue with more scrutiny and thoroughness.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The present essay has examined the hybrid genre of docudrama in relation to and its evolution from genres of film and documentary. An analog criticism was employed comparing the depiction of the 1978 "Guyana" massacre and subsequent mass suicide in Jonestown: the CBS docudrama entitled, "Guyana Tragedy: The Story of Jim Jones," was analyzed generically with the film or motion picture version, "Guyana: Cult of the Damned." The two formats were explicated by examining historical authenticity, the use of exaggeration or hyperbole to heighten conflict and dramatic structure, the use of "ideological" or loaded language, visual and dramatic conflict between characters, implicit and explicit meanings manifest in each format, and the narrative/structural differences discovered in both presentations. It has been shown that the docudrama is indeed an evolving media form that represents an optimal example of the ephemeral nature of media rhetoric and documentary form. The docudrama, it is suggested, borrows or extracts freely from both standard documentary format and various film genres. Moreover, the relationship of media rhetoric and ethical obligations and responsibilities of the creators of docudrama was brought to light. If the docudrama is indeed "de-rhetorical" speech and fulfills the functions of rhetoric (i.e. shaping a viewer's perceptions of reality or "inviting" an audience to experience some event), how does the critic draw the line between "dramatic license" and "historical distortion" for the purpose of enhancing conflict and drama?

The implications of such a study are worthy of consideration for

future rhetorical analyses of filmic form and documentary structure. By comparing different genres with each other, the critic has a yardstick for measuring the presence or absence of certain generic elements or "anatomical features" discovered in each format. If the critic is fortunate enough to examine how two different media genres (film and docudrama) portray a certain historical event (such as the "Guyana" story), the similarities and contrasts between the forms becomes apparent. I would suggest that the analog approach to criticism allows the critic to examine the evolution and ephemerality of media forms. It is simply inadequate to label docudrama a "hybrid" genre without first investigating how this form came into existence and how it extracted elements common to other media genres or forms in establishing its own compositional makeup. One may ask, for example, whether the CBS docudrama, "Guyana Tragedy," is a bona fide genre in its own right, or rather, if it represents a "sub-genre" combining film (the "horror film" genre) and standard documentary formats.

The "Guyana Tragedy" in particular, and docudrama in general, represents the clearest indication and argument yet for the evolutionary and ephemeral nature of media formats and genres of film, documentary, and prime-time television fare, from the detective story to the Western. Some would argue that while docudrama has functioned as an "extension" of the network newscast in providing a more detailed and amplified account of a given news story, it simultaneously employs the dramatic-narrative structure and fictive elements which have the potential to intentionally and unintentionally affect viewer perception of the subject matter. With the pure documentary format on the wane and losing its popularity for the

prime-time audience, the docudrama, I think will emerge as one of the most popular formats in future network programming. There is little question that docudrama is already a "hybrid" genre. The question remains as to how this form will continue to evolve and change. Will we see a variety of "sub-genres" emerging from this format? All indications are that we will. The docudrama has evolved from standard documentary form and genres of film to become a bona fide genre of media rhetoric today. It is not difficult to believe that the docudrama form we know today will change throughout the years; its evolution and capacity to change will be evident to viewers and critics alike. The themes of docudramas have reflected the "climate of opinion" of our society; this is, of course, a function of all forms of rhetoric and popular or high culture. The CBS docudrama has captured the most recent "trend" in the docudrama format. Critic Davidson explains that, ". . . 1980 might well become known as 'The Year of the Massacre.'" <sup>24</sup> Television producer and writer Melville Shavelson states that, "The networks are catering to the basest instincts of a potentially vast audience. Many people have a morbid sense of curiosity, which causes them to rush to the scene of auto and airplane crashes. The same morbid curiosity hooks them when they simply see the word 'Guyana' in the TV program listing. It conjures up visions of all those dead bodies lying around in Jonestown and that's what they tune in to see--whether the rest of the show has any valid purpose or not." <sup>25</sup> I would suggest, therefore, that the docudrama today is in a state of transition. The CBS docudrama reflected the climate of opinion of the times, the curious and morbid fascination that Americans have with

death, terror, and tragedy. In keeping with this essay's central theme, I believe that the docudrama today is moving closer to a "sub-genre" that may be called the "Rhetoric of Massacre and Terror." The NBC network, for example, recently aired the docudrama, "Kent State," which vividly and emotionally portrayed the killings at Kent State University by the Ohio National Guard. Did the treatment of this event by the docudrama format favor the students or the Guard? This new "sub-genre" of docudrama has also seen a variety of proposals to the networks for future portrayals of the "Hillside Strangler" story, a version of homosexual, mass-murderer John Gacy, and Florida's "convicted sorority-house slayer," Theodore Bundy. This new "sub-genre" of docudrama may be examined further through analog criticism. This latest "massacre" theme in network docudramas seems to have evolved from both standard documentary format for its recreation and interpretation of real-life events and historical occurrences, as well as borrowing certain basic ingredients from film genre popularly called the "horror film." The rhetorical critic needs to investigate further such extractions, as well as the changes of this form of media persuasion or the "evolution" of filmic genres. Finally, the critic must focus his or her critical sights on how such forms of media persuasion act as types of "de-rhetorical" speech, as well as the ethical implications for such rhetoric.

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<sup>3</sup>See Bruce E. Gronbeck, "Celluloid Rhetoric: On Genres of Documentary," in Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Jamieson, eds., Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action (Falls Church, Virginia: Speech Communication Association, 1978), 139-61; Daniel Edward Garvey, Jr., "The Documentary: Its Evolution and Contemporary Problems," Unpublished M.A. thesis, Stanford University, 1960; Raymond Lee Carroll, "Factual Television in America: An Analysis of Network Television Documentary Programs, 1948-1975," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1978; and Leslie K. Davis, "Controversy and the Network Documentary: Critical Analysis of Form" Communication Quarterly, 26 (Fall 1978).

<sup>4</sup>Reeves, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup>Hoffer and Nelson, p. 150.

<sup>6</sup>Carroll, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>See Bruce A. Austin, "Prime Time Television in a Medium-Sized Market: A Content Analysis," Communication Quarterly, 27 (Summer 1979), 37-40.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

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<sup>11</sup>Benson, "Joe: An Essay in the Rhetorical Criticism of Film," p. 612.

<sup>12</sup>Davidson, p. 67.

<sup>13</sup>Stanley J. Solomon, Beyond Formula: American Film Genres (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1976).

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

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<sup>17</sup>Solomon, p. 112.

<sup>18</sup>Davidson, p. 67.

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<sup>20</sup>Donald C. Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Functions and Its Scope,"  
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<sup>21</sup>Davidson, p. 67.

<sup>22</sup>Benson, "The Senses of Rhetoric," p. 247.

<sup>23</sup>Reeves, p. 38.

<sup>24</sup>Davidson, p. 66.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.